DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 209 650 CS 006 361

AUTHOR Gillis, M. K.
TITLE Federal Support Has Resulted in Effective Programs for Poor Readers in Small Schools.
PUB DATE Oct 81
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the College Reading Association (25th, Louisville, KY, October 29-31, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Compensatory Education; Elementary Education; *Program Effectiveness; Reading Instruction; *Reading Programs; Reading Research; School Support; *School Surveys; *Teacher Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

The goals of a four-year study of reading instruction conducted in 1976 were (1) to describe and analyze compensatory reading programs at grades two, four, and six; (2) to determine how compensatory programs related to student reading achievement improvement; and (3) to obtain detailed descriptions of unusually effective compensatory reading programs. The study began with a questionnaire to principals and teachers in over 700 randomly selected schools across the nation. The study ended with an intensive study of five schools with unusually effective compensatory reading programs. The results indicated that effective reading programs for poor readers did not depend upon a specific approach, a special set of materials, or particular instructional techniques. Qualities the programs did have in common included the recognition of reading as an important instructional goal with priority assigned to it; allocation of a large proportion of instructional time to reading and language arts instruction; the use of best resources, people, and materials; the availability of a variety of materials for meeting individual reading needs; concerned teachers who were excited about and involved in the reading program; and leadership to get the whole staff behind the program. (HOD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED209650

FEDERAL SUPPORT HAS RESULTED IN EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS FOR POOR READERS IN SMALL SCHOOLS

M. K. Gillis

Southwest Texas State University

San Marcos, Texas 78666

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

M.K. Gillis

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS006361

FEDERAL SUPPORT HAS RESULTED IN EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS FOR POOR READERS IN SMALL SCHOOLS

Effective compensatory reading programs occur in schools where reading is defined as an important instructional goal and priority assigned to it; strong leadership for the reading program exists; careful attention is paid to teaching basic reading skills; and teachers who have access to a variety of materials for teaching reading share concerns and ideas about teaching reading. Most such programs have been supported by federal monies. These were the findings of a four-year study of reading instruction provided ior students reading below grade-level in the United States (Trismen, Waller, & Wilder, 1976).

The goals of the study were to describe and analyze compensatory reading programs at grades 2, 4, and 6; to determine how compensatory programs related to student reading achievement improvement; and to obtain detailed descriptions of unusually effective compensatory reading programs (Educational Testing Service, 1976a). The study began with a questionnaire to principals and teachers in over 700 randomly-selected schools across the nation. The study ended with intensive study of five schools with unusually effective compensatory reading programs. Two of these unusually effective programs occurred in small schools in poor, isolated communities. This article reports the results of the study and describes the two unusually effective small school programs.

General Results

Over 500 schools responded to the original questionnaire. The majority had compensatory reading programs and most of these programs received federal support, usually in the form of Title I monies (Educational Testing Service, 1976b). A detailed study was conducted for a stratified sample of 263 of these programs (Educational Testing Service, 1976b). There was a great deal of variety in the approaches, methods, and materials used in their regular and compensatory reading programs. In the vast majority of programs basal readers were used. Most teachers reported supplementing the basals with other materials, often teacher-made. The students receiving the compensatory assistance were the most educationally needy based on their initial reading test scores, and were most often poor as evidenced by their participation in free lunch programs. Schools with compensatory reading programs spent little more per pupil than schools without such programs on reading instruction which occurred in the regular classroom. Schools with compensatory programs provided additional reading instruction to a small percentage (2 to 6) of their pupils outside of the classroom in small groups. The per pupil cost of this instruction was about three times that of developmental or compensatory classroom instruction (Flynn, Hass, & Al-Salam, 1976). Over one-third of the students at the grade-levels studied were receiving extra help in the schools with compensatory programs. These students made greater gains in reading achievement and attitudes than do poor readers who do not receive such assistance (Educational Testing Service, 1976a).

Effective Programs

Twenty-nine schools with effective or ineffective programs were observed and studied in greater detail. Finally, five schools with unusually effective compensatory reading programs were the subject of intensive observation and investigation (Trismen, Waller, & Wilder, 1976). The five unusually effective programs were identified by the extent to which average Spring total reading test scores exceeded those expected based on Fall scores and socioeconomic factors.

These programs could not be differentiated from other compensatory programs in terms of their approaches, methods, or materials. All used basals supplemented with a variety of other materials, often teacher-made. Methods and materials used ranged from language experience to programmed readers and a set of directions/instructions "memorized" by teachers and "recited" during instruction. Neither did the five spend more or less money than other schools on their compensatory reading programs.

The five programs did share some common elements. All were receiving some type of federal assistance. Both of the exceptional small school programs were receiving Title I funds. All considered reading an important instructional goal and demonstrated the priority placed on reading by the time or resources they devoted to reading. In all a variety of materials were available for teaching reading. Both small schools had special reading teachers and instructional aides for the reading program. In one exceptional small school

program most reading instruction occurred in the traditional three-group format in self-contained classrooms. The aides and reading teacher provided additional instruction for the compensatory pupils on a pullout basis. Instruction in the Title I Lab, as in the classrooms, was based on basal readers, Audiovisual equipment, supplementary materials, and teacher-made materials provided drill, additional practice, and variety. The lab had a small lending library and the classrooms room libraries. The other small school with an unusually effective compensatory reading program took a more innovative approach. This school too had a special reading teacher and instructional aides for the reading program. Classroom teachers in this school took primary responsibility for the reading achievement of all students. Aides worked with teachers and students in the regular classrooms. The special reading teacher functioned as a resource teacher. At least half of each day was spent on reading and reading-related instruction in this school. Reading instruction was individualized, based on contracts aimed at helping each student to achieve prescribed goals. Some of the classrooms were multiaged. The reading resource teacher had classified all of the materials in the school as to reading level and skill. Most teachers in the school used basals. In addition they used a variety of audiovisual and supplementary programs and materials, some teacher-made. The reading resource teacher helped test pupils and prescribe instruction, monitor pupil progress, provide materials, and demonstrate teaching techniques.

In each of the schools with unusually effective compensatory reading programs effective leadership for the reading program was in evidence. In the traditional small school program it was a new principal who provided that leadership - procuring new materials, urging teachers to use them, to create new materials, to set up classroom libraries, etc. Teachers in this school felt that their reading program was improved, and gave credit to the principal's leadership (Trismen, Waller, & Wilder, 1976). In the more innovative small school program both the principal and reading resource teacher provided leadership for the program. The principal was effective in motivating the teachers toward change and improvement. It was he who had in years past changed the role of the special reading teacher from remedial instructor to resource teacher, instituted the multiaged classes, and helped to initiate the individualized reading contracts. The teachers and community had been and continued to be involved in planning the changes that were occurring in the this school. Teachers admired the principal and valued the assistance of the reading resource teacher (Trismen, Waller, & Wilder, 1976). In all of the schools with unusually effective compensatory reading programs the teachers felt themselves to be involved in and committed to the reading program and shared concerns and ideas about reading instruction freely.

Conclusion

It is not surprising to learn, again, from the results of this study that effective reading programs for poor readers do not depend upon a specific approach, set of materials, or particular instructional techniques. Effective programs for poor readers also do not result solely from good teaching, although they cannot occur if it does not prevail. Nor, given a minimal level or resources (of which Title I was most often the source), does money seem to be the crucial element.

Effective compensatory programs seem to have qualities which transcend and influence individual classrooms. These qualities can be achieved in schools of any size. Reading must be seen as an important instructional goal and priority assigned to it. A large proportion of instructional time must be allocated to reading/language arts instruction. The best resources, people and materials, must be devoted to reading. A variety of materials for meeting individual reading needs must be available. This need not be expensive. Ten copies of three different readers and related materials are no more costly than 30 copies of one reader and related materials. Concerned teachers create materials to supplement reading instruction. Teachers who are excited about and involved in a reading program share not only concerns and ideas but also materials. Leadership is needed to get the whole staff behind the program. In a small school, which may have no reading specialist or a traveling specialist who is only on campus part-time, leadership for the reading program may depend upon the

principal. The minimal funds needed for an effective compensatory program in a small school may not be available locally. Federal support made the difference in the two effective small school compensatory programs reported.

References

Educational Testing Service. A study of compensatory reading programs. Executive Summary. Princeton N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1976a.

Educational Testing Service. A study of compensatory reading programs. Technical Summary. Princeton N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1976b.

Flynn, D., Hass. A., and Al-Salam, N. An evaluation of the cost-effectiveness of alternative compensatory reading programs volume III: Cost-effectiveness analysis of regular school year programs. Bethesda, Md.: RMC Research Corporation, 1976.

Trismen, D., Waller, M., & Wilder, G. A descriptive and analytic study of compensatory reading programs: Final report volume II. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1976.